

## Puñña,kiriya,vatthu Sutta

The Discourse on the Grounds for Merit-making | A 8.36/4:241-243

Theme: Benefits of practising giving, moral virtue, and meditation

Translated by Piya Tan ©2008

### 1 Introduction

**1.1 RELATED TEXTS.** Besides the model of the threefold training (*sikkhā*) of moral virtue (*sīla*), concentration [meditation] (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*), there is the simpler model of the three grounds for merit-making (*puñña,kiriya,vatthu*) of giving (*dāna*), moral virtue (*sīla*) and mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*). Clearly, the three grounds of merit-making are a training model for the laity and for non-contemplative monastics, especially since “wisdom” is not listed as an immediate goal.

We shall here examine the following texts related to the grounds for merit-making, that is,

- |  |                       |          |
|--|-----------------------|----------|
| (1) <b>The Puñña,kiriya,vatthu Sutta 1</b> | (It 3.2.1/51 f)       | [2];     |
| (2) <b>The Puñña,kiriya,vatthu Sutta 2</b> | (A 8.36/4:241-243)    | [3];     |
| (3) <b>The Saṅgīti Sutta</b>               | (D 33.1.10(38)/3:218) | [4];     |
| (4) <b>The Abhidhamm’attha,saṅgaha</b>     | (esp Abhdv 134-137)   | [5]; and |
| (5) <b>The Moha,vicchedanī</b>             | (Mohv:VRI 26-29)      | [5.1.2]. |

These texts are arranged in what I think would be the ascending order of lateness, that is, the first text being the oldest. The three grounds of merit are also given in two parallel discourses, **the (Puñña) Metta Sutta** (A 7.58a) and **the Mā Puñña Bhāyī Sutta** (It 1.3.2), both of which we have examined elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

**1.2 THE RENUNCIANT’S GROUNDS FOR MERIT-MAKING.** **The (Brahma,vihāra) Subha Sutta** (M 99) records a dialogue between the Buddha and the young brahmin, Subha Todeyya,putta, where Subha mentions “the five duties for the making of merit” (*pañca dhamme puññassa kiriyāya*) of a brahmin student, thus:

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| (1) truth                             | ( <i>sacca</i> ; Skt <i>satya</i> );                          |
| (2) asceticism                        | ( <i>tapa</i> ; Skt <i>tapas</i> );                           |
| (3) celibacy                          | ( <i>brahma,cāriya</i> ; Skt <i>brahma,cārya</i> );           |
| (4) recitation [study] (of the Vedas) | ( <i>ajjhena</i> ; Skt <i>adhyayana</i> ); and                |
| (5) renunciation                      | ( <i>cāga</i> ; Skt <i>tyāga</i> ). (M 99.21/2:206) = SD 38.6 |

The Buddha responds by listing, in almost identical terms, the renunciant’s version of the grounds for merit-making (*pabbajita puñña,kiriya,vatthu*), that is,

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (1) a speaker of the truth                  | ( <i>sacca,vādī</i> );                                 |
| (2) he is an ascetic                        | ( <i>tapassī hoti</i> );                               |
| (3) he is a celibate                        | ( <i>brahma,cārī hoti</i> );                           |
| (4) he is engaged in much Dharma recitation | ( <i>sajjhāya,bahulo hoti</i> ); and                   |
| (5) he renounces much                       | ( <i>cāga,bahulo hoti</i> ). (M 99.21/2:206) = SD 38.6 |

It is at once apparent from this list that it is the basic training of a neophyte, that is, a novice (*sāmaṇera*) or novice monk (*navaka bhikkhu*). Prominent in their absence are mental cultivation (*bhāvanā* or *samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*), which are found in the threefold training (*ti,sikkhā*). This is understandable because the beginner to the holy life needs some merit (*puñña*) to boost his energies, and that as he progresses of the spiritual path, he needs more than merit, which is the traditional notion of “good” through bodily and verbal actions: he needs “spiritual skill” (*kusala*), that is, the wholesomeness of all the three doors of action: body, speech and mind.<sup>2</sup> This is found in the threefold training.

<sup>1</sup> A 7.58a/4:88-91 = SD 2.11a & It 1.3.2/14-16 = SD 2.11b respectively.

<sup>2</sup> On the differences btw *puñña* and *kusala*, see **Beyond good and evil** = SD 18.7 esp §6.

## 2 The Iti,vuttaka on *puñña,kiriya,vatthu*

**2.1 THE OLDEST TEXT ON PUÑÑA,KIRIYA,VATTHU.** The Iti,vuttaka has a **Puñña,kiriya,vatthu Sutta** in its Book of Threes (Tika Nipāta) (It 3.2.1/51 f). To distinguish this discourse from the Aṅguttara version (A 8.36), we can call this the “(Iti,vuttaka) Puñña,kiriya,vatthu Sutta” or simply, “Puñña,kiriya,vatthu Sutta 2” (hence, calling the former, “Puñña,kiriya,vatthu Sutta 1”). **The Mā Puñña Bhāyī Sutta** (It 1.3.2) alludes to the ground of merit-making as “giving, taming and control” (*dāna dama saññama*).<sup>3</sup>

The Iti,vuttaka version is much shorter than the Aṅguttara version, and from the lack of technical terms, is likely to be an older version, even the oldest of the four main texts discussed here.

### SD 22.17(2.1)

## Puñña,kiriya,vatthu Sutta 2

The Discourse on the Grounds for Merit-making 2 | It 60/51 f

Traditional: It 3.2.1 Khuddaka Nikāya, Iti,vuttaka 3, Tika Nipāta 2, Dutiya Vagga 1

Theme: The three grounds for merit-making

*Vuttam h’etaṃ bhagavatā  
vuttam arahatā ti me sutam:*

1 *Tīṇ’imāni bhikkhave puñña,kiriya,vatthūni.*

*Katamāni tīṇi?*

(1) *Dāna,mayaṃ puñña,kiriya,vatthu,*

(2) *Sīla,mayaṃ puñña,kiriya,vatthu,*

(3) *Bhāvanā,mayaṃ puñña,kiriya,vatthu.*

*Imāni kho bhikkhave tīṇi puññakiriyavatthūni’ ti.*

[Interlinear version:]

*Etam attham bhagavā avoca  
tath’etaṃ iti vuccati:*

2 *Puññam eva so sikkheyya  
āyat’aggam sukh’udrayam  
dānañ ca sama,cariyañ ca  
metta,cittañ ca bhāvaye.*

3 *Ete dhamme bhāvayitvā  
tayo sukha,samuddaye  
abyāpajjham sukham lokam  
paṇḍito upapajjatī ti.*

[Idiomatic version:]

2 One should train in merit—fruiting in happiness lasting and foremost—  
One should cultivate giving, calm [harmonious] conduct and a lovingkind heart.

3 Having cultivated these three states, happiness arises:  
The wise is reborn into a happy trouble-free world.

*Ayam pi attho vutto bhagavatā.  
Iti me sutan ti.*

This was indeed spoken by the Blessed One,  
spoken by the Arhat, thus have I heard:<sup>4</sup>

1 “Bhikshus, there are these three grounds  
for merit-making.

What are the three?

(1) the ground for merit-making through giving.

(2) the ground for merit-making through moral virtue.

(3) the ground for merit-making through cultivation.

These, bhikshus, are the three grounds for  
merit-making.”

The Blessed One spoke on this matter.  
In this connection, he said this:

2 One should truly train in merit—  
fruiting in lasting and foremost happiness<sup>5</sup>—  
giving and calm [harmonious] conduct<sup>6</sup> and  
should cultivate a heart of lovingkindness.

3 Having cultivated these states  
three, happiness arises,  
into a happy trouble-free world  
the wise is reborn.

This matter, too, was spoken by the Blessed One.  
Thus I have heard.

<sup>3</sup> It 1.3.2.4/15 = SD 2.11b.

<sup>4</sup> This is said to be spoken by the laywoman **Khujj’uttarā**: see SD 16.14 Intro (1).

<sup>5</sup> Be Ce Se so; Ee *sukh’indriyam* (preferred); Ee *sukh’indriyam*.

<sup>6</sup> *Sama,cariya*, alt tr: “a life of stillness” or “harmonious living”: see **Mā Puñña Bhāyī S** (It 1.3.2) Intro (2).

— evaṃ —

**The Puñña,kiriya,vatthu Sutta 2** (It 3.2.1) is perhaps the oldest statement on the grounds for merit-making (*puñña,kiriya,vatthu*). After a very brief traditional opening, it simply lists the three grounds, and closes with two stanzas [§§2 f]. This Iti,vuttaka version is clearly older than even the Puñña,kiriya,vatthu Sutta 1 (A 8.35), which only mentions rebirth, especially in the sense-world heavens, naming the leader of each of them in turn. It is also free of technical terms, simply exhorting us to practise the three grounds of merit for happiness here and hereafter. This suggests that the words of the Sutta are simply reminders to us to keep up our mindfulness training after receiving some proper verbal face-to-face instructions. Indeed, in terms of practice, we should not read too much into the letter of the text, but rather tease out its spirit alongside our Dharma-based practice and those authentic living teachers.

A delightful discourse that is fully dedicated to merit (*puñña*) is **the Nidhi,kaṇḍa Sutta** (Khp no 8), where it is compared to a treasure trove, but one that neither thieves can remove nor anyone else take away. (Khp 8/7). This text should be studied and reflected on alongside the suttas mentioned in this study.

**2.3 TERMS AND CONDITIONS. The Iti,vuttaka Commentary** (ItA 23-26) gives a comprehensive definition of the term *puñña,kiriya,vatthu*, thus:

- *puñña* (**merit**) is that which has a prolonging effect on our existence;
- *puñña,kiriya* (**merit-making**) refers to the act of creating or maintaining the conditions or support for merit; and
- *puñña,kiriya,vatthu* (**ground for merit-making**) are the benefit that arise from such a transaction. (ItA 2:23 f)<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes, “merit” is used as a synonym for “wholesomeness” (*kusala*), but they have an important difference: merit, no matter how good, keeps us in samsara, the world of suffering, but the wholesome is what brings us out of suffering onto liberation.<sup>8</sup> The opposite of “merit” (*puñña*) is “demerit” (*apuñña*) or “evil” (*pāpa*); only the arhats are beyond good and evil.<sup>9</sup>

*Puñña,kiriya,vatthu*, as such, translates literally as “the ground for the making of merit,” that is, a source of merit. The suffix *-maya* in each of the three qualities translates as “made of” (as in *mano,maya*, “mind-made,” Dh 1-2), or, as glossed by the Aṅguttara Commentary, as “by intention” (*cetanāsu*) (AA 1:126). As such, we can render the three kinds of *puñña,kiriya,vatthu* simply as:

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| (1) giving-based merit-making      | ( <i>dāna,maya puñña,kiriya,vatthu</i> );     |
| (2) virtue-based merit-making      | ( <i>sīla,maya puñña,kiriya,vatthu</i> ); and |
| (3) cultivation-based merit-making | ( <i>bhāvanā,maya puñña,kiriya,vatthu</i> ).  |

Giving is a good start for spiritual training because it easily creates goodwill amongst beings. In fact, there is a related practice, that is, the recollection of charity (*cāgānussati*), which when cultivated after the practice inspires great joy. Similarly, there is also the recollection of virtue (*sīlānussati*), which galvanizes joy through reflecting that we have kept to the precepts and it attending happiness. Such joy is conducive to samadhi in meditation, which is the third ground for merit, and which when properly cultivated leads on to insight wisdom.

<sup>7</sup> *Puñña,kiriya,vatthūnī* ti puṇṇa,bhava,phalaṃ nibbattenti, attano santānaṃ punantī ti vā **puññāni**, puññāni ca tāni hetu,paccayehi kattaḃbo kiriyā cāti **puñña,kiriya**. Tā eva ca tesam tesam ānisaṃsānaṃ vatthu,bhāvato **puñña,kiriya,vatthūnī**, “~ means that they bring forth the karmic fruit for an honourable existence. They are called ‘merit’ (*puñña*) because they prolong one’s continuity (*attano santānaṃ punanti*),” and ‘merit-making’ (*puñña,kiriya*) are what should be done, what needs to be done, through the conditioning and support of these merit. And ‘the grounds for merit’ (*puñña,kiriya,vatthūni*) are just these various benefits (*ānisaṃsa*) arising from these grounds.” (ItA 2:23 f); see also Dh 18, 118, 122; KhpA 230.

<sup>8</sup> See **Virtue ethics** = SD 18.11.

<sup>9</sup> Sn 520, 547, 636, 790: see **Beyond good and evil** = SD 18.7.

### 3 The Puñña,kiriya,vatthu Sutta 1 (A 8.36)

**3.1 SUTTA SUMMARY.** The Aṅguttara version is the best known of the three texts on *puñña,kiriya,vatthu* mentioned here. It simply opens with the Buddha at once stating what the three grounds of merit-making are. The Sutta then continues by saying that a person who rarely practises generosity, has little moral virtue, and *no* mental cultivation, he is reborn amongst humans, but into unfavourable circumstances [§3]. In a similar case, where the person does have *some* moral virtue, he is reborn as a human into favourable circumstances [§4].

In the case of those of who show great generosity *and* great moral virtues, they are reborn in any of the sense-world heavens [§5-10]. However, the text notes that in each heaven, their celestial leader surpasses the other devas of their respective realms in ten blessings. All this is the result of practising the three grounds for merit.

**3.2 INTERPRETING KARMA.** The Commentary explains that merit is made when we reflect (after the deed) thus, “Such and such a giving has been given, the precepts have been kept, meditation has been cultivated.” (AA 1:126). It goes on to remark, somewhat simplistically, that “amongst humans in unfavourable circumstances” (*manussa,dobhagam*) means low class families (*nīca,kula*), and “amongst humans in favourable circumstances” (*manussa,sobhagam*) as referring to the three higher classes (kshatriya, brahmins, and vaishyas) (id).

In our own times and circumstances, this commentarial interpretation seems to suggest that past *bad* karma brings us rebirth into the low or menial classes, peopled mostly by the rude, wretched, and ignorant, and that past *good* karma brings us rebirth into the middle and upper classes or families involved in running the country (kshatriyas), in education and religion (brahmins), and in commerce (vaishyas). Such an interpretation may apply in the Indian society of the Buddha’s time, or even in the times of the Commentators, but modern urbanized societies have become more complicated on account of its class mobility and socioeconomic opportunities.

In fact, karma as taught in the Suttas is much less simplistic, but more psychologically dynamic, than the Commentaries, meaning that karmic results have to do more with *how* we think, much more than *what* we are. Karma, after all, is *intention*.<sup>10</sup> In other words, our past karma provides us with the body and circumstances that we are born into. Karma is not merely about avoiding negative fruits and attaining desired results, but about how we can better ourselves as an individual, as a social being, and above all, to liberate ourselves from spiritual ignorance.

Our present actions (bodily, verbal and thought) mould and modify us either unconsciously or consciously. If we let karma autopilot us, then we are heading down the *unconscious* path of spiritual devolution, but if we *consciously* watch, guard and direct our actions, we are walking the path of spiritual evolution. We have the choice, most of the time; when we do not, either we have not tried hard enough, or we should simply let the karmic energy resolve itself. The dawn still comes even after the darkest night—as long as we are awake.

**3.3 INCOMPLETE SUTTA?** The Sutta appears to be incomplete, ending rather abruptly, without mentioning the role of the cultivation-based ground for merit (*bhāvanā,maya puñña,kiriya,vatthu*). There are a few possible reasons for this. Firstly, it could be due to transmission error, that is, a part of it was lost in transmission (for example, a palm leaf was lost many centuries or a over millennium ago). Or, it could be an editing error, that is, some time after the Buddha, the reciters inadvertently omitted the ending. We are here referring to a document that is about 2500 years old!

However, the Sutta, as we have it, tells us a lot. It says that even if we only practise *just a little* generosity and moral virtue, we will attain a *human* birth. If we practise *both well*, we will have a *good* human rebirth. It does not say anything about mental cultivation, but which we can fill in from other suttas, such as:

<sup>10</sup> A 6.63/3:415 = SD 6.11; see also **Karma** = SD 18.1(3.2).

- **Sāleyyaka Sutta** (M 41/1:285-290) SD 5.7
- **Cūḷa Kamma,vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 135/3:202-206) SD 4.15
- **Saṅkhār’upapatti Sutta** (A 10.206/5:292-297) SD 3.9

The teachings of such suttas is that if we cultivate true giving, moral virtue and mindfulness, we will be able to choose our future rebirth, but we must choose well!

Or, it is possible that the Puñña,kiriya,vatthu Sutta *is* complete, after all: it records texts just as the Buddha has taught it. Maybe the Buddha has expounded just that, and then retires into his fragrant cell, and no other arhat continues the teaching because everyone else begins to meditate.

Of course, there is the possibility, too, that the teaching is given to a lay follower or a congregation of them, and the Buddha feels that is sufficient for the time being. Perhaps, they attained the Dharma eye at the end of the Sutta, and the Buddha sees no reason to continue. In this sense, many of the suttas are incomplete, as they are taught to fit and benefit a particular audience.

Whatever the reason, studying the Suttas is like listening to a living transmission of the Buddha talking to us down the millennia. We hear a bit of his short message here, another long message there, and so on, and we put it all together in the stillness of our minds. The Buddha is like a master musician who teaches us a beautiful melody or even just a musical phrase, and then leaves us to complete the piece. If we know our instrument well, practise well, play well, we will produce beautiful music, and feel liberated by it! The bottom line is that no matter how many suttas we study, they are all incomplete: the suttas are only complete when we awaken on the path.

## 4 The Saṅgīti Sutta

**4.1 The Saṅgīti Sutta** (D 33) only lists a gist of the teaching of Puñña,kiriya,vatthu Suttas in its section on triads (*tika*), and simply says:

<i>Tīṇi puñña,kiriya,vatthūni: dāna,mayaṃ puñña,kiriya,vatthu, sīla,mayaṃ puñña,kiriya,vatthu, bhāvanā,mayaṃ puñña,kiriya,vatthu.</i>	The three grounds for merit-making: (1) the ground for merit-making through giving, (2) the ground for merit-making through moral virtue, (3) the ground for merit-making through cultivation. (D 33.1.10(38)/3:218)
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Besides the three traditional grounds of merit, the Sutta Commentary (DA 3:999 f) further mentions seven others, giving the well known ten grounds of merit, defined in a similar manner as the Abhidhamma tradition [5.1], and the classifying the seven under the original three grounds [5.2].

**4.2** Another interesting possibility is that the teaching of the three ground developed into the ten perfections (*dasa pāramī*), as elaborated in **the Cariyā,piṭaka Commentary** (CA 276-332).<sup>11</sup> All the ten grounds of merit are directly or indirectly explained in this Commentary.

## 5 The Abhidhamma on the grounds for merit-making

### 5.1 THE 10 BASES OF MERIT-MAKING.

5.1.1 THE ABHIDHAMMA REFERENCES. The grounds for merit-making are explained in some detail in such Abhidhamma works as the Attha,sālinī, the Abhidhamm’attha,saṅgaha and the Moha,vicchedanī. **The Attha,sālinī** (DhsA), the Commentary to the Dhamma,saṅganī, a canonical Abhidhamma work.<sup>12</sup> Understandably, this Commentary explains the grounds for merit-making (*puñña,kiriya,vatthu*) in terms of types of consciousness and the realms in the technical Abhidhamma style. However, where the explanations are useful where they are in line with the Sutta tradition.

<sup>11</sup> Tr Bodhi 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Tr as *The Expositor* (vols 1-2), London: Pali Text Society, 1921. The tr is dated and the English somewhat stilted, awaiting a new tr; but it is still useful for the serious and informed student. See KR Norman, *Pali Literature*, 1983b:24-26; Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature*, 1996:149-152.



**The Abhidhamm’attha,saṅgaha** (Abhds) is a well known mediaeval compendium on Abhidhamma written by Anuruddha (10th or 11th century Sri Lanka), but more helpful is its commentary by Sumaṅgala, entitled **the Abhidhamm’attha,vibhāvinī** (Abhdv).<sup>13</sup>

**The Moha,vicchedanī** (Mohv) is a commentary on the Abhidhamma matrices (*māṭikā*), a kind of list summaries of Abhidhamma doctrines, famously beginning with “*Kusalā dhammā, akusalā dhammā, avyakatā dhammā...*” written by Kassapa of Coḷa around 1200 in south India.<sup>14</sup>

All such works state or accept that the grounds for merit-making pertains to the sense-world (*kāma,-bhava*), that is, the world of the senses that we inhabit.<sup>15</sup> They are performed through any or all of the three doors of action (*dvāra*): the body, speech and mind (Dh 234). In the Abhidhamma system of classifying consciousness, there are the ten grounds for merit-making,<sup>16</sup> which we shall now examine.

5.1.2 THE 10 GROUNDS FOR MERIT-MAKING. All these works expanded the three grounds for merit-making (giving, moral virtue and cultivation) into the ten grounds for merit-making (*dasa puñña,kiriya,-vatthu*), thus:<sup>17</sup>

(1) giving	( <i>dāna</i> )	}	lovingkindness ( <i>mettā</i> )
(2) moral virtue	( <i>sīla</i> )		
(3) mental cultivation	( <i>bhāvanā</i> )		
(4) respectfulness	( <i>apacāyana</i> )	}	compassion ( <i>karuṇā</i> )
(5) service	( <i>veyyāvacca</i> )		
(6) dedicating of merit	( <i>patti,dāna</i> )	}	altruistic joy ( <i>muditā</i> )
(7) rejoicing in the merit of others	( <i>pattānumodanā</i> )		
(8) listening to the Dharma	( <i>dhamma,savana</i> )		
(9) teaching the Dharma	( <i>dhamma,desanā</i> )	}	equanimity ( <i>upekkhā</i> )
(10) straightening of views	( <i>diṭṭhi’jju,kamma</i> )		

Actions (1-4) must be motivated by lovingkindness, especially when we are dealing with equals or beings in general. Actions (5-6) must be motivated by compassion, especially when we are doing this to those who are less fortunate or who need our help. Actions (7-9) must be motivated with altruistic joy, so that we can benefit from the goodness of others. And lastly action (10) is when, with a calm and clear mind, we examine our own selves to weed out or correct wrong views, or at least seek to clear our doubts.

(1) **Giving (*dāna*)** is sometimes translated as “generosity,” glossed as “*dāna* is that from which (or on account of which) one gives” (*dīyati etenā ti dānam*); it is the intention to be charitable (*pariccāga,-cetanā*).<sup>18</sup> As a ground for merit, giving (as an act of generosity) includes giving such things as the means of support (*paccaya*), that is, clothing (especially robes), food, shelter and medication, which are given in

<sup>13</sup> DA 3:999; DhA 157-162 = DhA:PR 215-208; Abhdv 134-137 = Abhds:WG 184-188; Abhs:BRS 5.24/209 f; Abhs:SR 146; Mohv:VRI 26-29

<sup>14</sup> Mohv:VRI 26 f.

<sup>15</sup> The universe comprises of three worlds: (1) the sense-world (*kāma,bhava*), which depends on the 6 senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind), and incl the subhuman realms of suffering; (2) the form world (*rūpa,bhava*), which exists in subtle form, especially as radiance, without the kind of physical body that we have and are as a rule sustained by joyful focussed mental states (*jhāna*); and (3) the formless world (*arūpa,bhava*) has no corporeality whatsoever and is purely mental, that is, the beings there exists purely on a mental plane. (D 3:215; M 1:294)

<sup>16</sup> Abhds 134 = Abhds:BRS 5.24/209. Sometimes these grounds become 12, with the addition of “praising others’ good deeds” (*pasamsā*) to “rejoicing in the merit of others,” and “refuge-taking” (*saraṇa*) and “recollection” (*anussati*) instead of “straightening of views.” The form dhyanas (*rūpa,jhāna*) and the formless attainments (*arūpa,-samāpatti*) are also regarded as states based on meritorious deeds.

<sup>17</sup> See Abhds 134.

<sup>18</sup> Abhds 135; Abhds:Be 175.

a proper manner.<sup>19</sup> We tend to receive the karmic benefits of our generosity in due course, here and hereafter. What is given is well saved.<sup>20</sup>

(2) **Moral virtue (*sīla*)** refers to what we practise (*sīlati*). The meaning is that it properly fixes, rightly establishes, the karma of body and speech. Or, “moral virtue” is what is practised or upheld. But here it is the state of being determined on the wholesome that acts as a support.<sup>21</sup> Hence, it is said, “one is established in virtue...” and so on (*sīle patiṭṭhāyā tyādi*).<sup>22</sup>

The cultivation of moral virtue occurs with the keeping to the five precepts,<sup>23</sup> or eight precepts, or ten precepts. Or thinking, “I will renounce the world,” and having gone to a monastery and becoming a renunciant, he reflects: “I have fulfilled my wish; I am indeed a monk. That is good and well done.” He keeps to the monastic code of conduct, carefully reflects on the four means of support, guards the sense-doors, and clears himself of even minor offences. Since we habitually conduct ourselves in a morally noble manner, we are likely to find our way into morally noble families and continue to live happy lives.<sup>24</sup>

(3) **Mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*)** is the means by which one brings into being (*bhāveti*) wholesome states, associates with them, causes them to grow.<sup>25</sup> Mental cultivation begins with the reflection that all our senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind) are impermanent, unsatisfactory and have no abiding entity; and regard the various sense-objects, sense-contacts, and sense-perceptions, old age, decay and death, all in the same manner. Mental cultivation, if cultivated to the level of dhyana or formless attainment, gives us the propensity to be reborn in such a state, and such states are expedient in the gaining of direct knowledge and liberation.<sup>26</sup>

(4) **Respectfulness (*apacāyana*)** is the means by which one shows respect (*apacayati*), acts properly by way of honouring.<sup>27</sup> Traditionally, respect is shown in such ways as when we meet a practising monk, salute him with joined palms, we take his bowl and robe, and offer him a seat and some water as appropriate. A common mark of respect would be to give way to elders when meeting them. “Respect” here should not be taken in the ritual way, which has very little moral value, as the intention behind such an action is not always pure. “Respect” properly means “accepting others as they are,” that is, using our present-moment awareness not to measure or judge others, but to relate to them (especially those near and dear) as if meeting them for the first time. In other words, when we show a sincere interest in people, we are more likely to encourage them to show their better sides. There is also “self-respect,” that is, abstaining from evil or unwholesome deeds through the feeling of **moral shame (*ottappa*)**, that such negative results would bring disgrace upon us and those close to us.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>19</sup> DhsA 157 = DhsA:PR 209. For details on proper manner of giving, see eg **Cūḷa Puṇṇama S** (M 110.23/3:24) = SD 45.4; **Velāma S** (A 9.20/4:392) = SD 16.6; (**Sumana**) **Dāna S** (A 6.37/3:336 f) = SD 22.1 Intro; **Aputtaka S 2** (S 3.20) = SD 22.5 Intro (2).

<sup>20</sup> (**Agāra**) **Āditta S** (S 1.41/1:31 f = SD 2.8) = (**Āditta**) **Jana S** (A 3.52/1:156) = **Āditta J** (J 424.11/4: 471 = SD 22.10a).

<sup>21</sup> This whole para: *sīlā ti sīlaṃ, kāya, vacī, kammāni samādahati, sammā ṭhapetī tyattho, sīlayati vā upadhāretī ti sīlaṃ, upadhāraṇaṃ paṇ’ettha kusalānaṃ adhiṭṭhāna, bhāvo* (Abhds 135; Abhds:Be 176).

<sup>22</sup> S 1:13, 165; Vism 1/1:1.

<sup>23</sup> The five precepts are the training rules in *natural morality* (which applies to every being). Keeping to the five precepts helps us maintain a minimum level of the restraint of body and speech that allows society to exist in a wholesome manner. The other sets of precepts are *prescribe morality*, as they are introduced by the Buddha, and are optional to the lay practitioner. Monastic rules, too, are prescribed morality, but monastics have to adhere to them all the time, as these rules define the basic status of recluseship. On the 10 courses of action, see **Sāleyyaka S** (M 41) = SD 5.7 Intro (2). On the 5th precept (against drunkenness and addiction), see **Sigāl’ovāda S** (D 31.7(1)/3:182 f) = SD 4.1 n.

<sup>24</sup> DhsA 157 = DhsA:PR 209.

<sup>25</sup> *Bhāveti kusale dhamme āsevati vaddhesi etāyāti bhāvanā* (Abhds 135; Abhds:Be 176).

<sup>26</sup> DhsA 157 = DhsA:PR 209. On meditation, see **Bhāvanā** = SD 15.1.

<sup>27</sup> *Apacāyati pūjā, vasena sāmīcim karoti etenā ti apacayanam* (Abhds 135; Abhds:Be 176).

<sup>28</sup> DhsA 157 = DhsA:PR 209.

(5) **Service (*veyyāvaccā*)** is the condition of one who is intent (*vyavaṭṭa*) to do his various duties.<sup>29</sup> Traditionally, the lay followers show a careful awareness of monastics and serious practitioners with personal service according to their needs, and in providing them with the right conditions for their practice, such as a suitable environment, food, transport, lightings, books, etc. Service here covers a range of beneficial conduct from a simple act of providing drinking water for a teacher to doing well-organized social work to running a Buddhist organization. Since we maintain such a nurturing awareness, we are likely to attract similar conditions for ourselves in this life and future ones.<sup>30</sup>

(6) **Dedicating of merit (*patti,dāna*)** is that by which what has arisen in one's continuity (flow of consciousness) is "given away."<sup>31</sup> This is often the most misunderstood of the grounds for merit-making, as no merit (*puñña* or *patti*) is actually "transferred" or "given,"<sup>32</sup> except in the sense that the good that we do in some way benefits others, especially when we "dedicate" the merit to them. For example, after making a suitable offering, or a Sutta study, or a session of meditation, we reflect thus: "Let the merit of this (giving, etc) be for the wellbeing of so-and-so," or "By this merit, may all beings be well and happy!"<sup>33</sup> Dedication of merit, is as such, a lay person's interesting way of cultivating lovingkindness.<sup>34</sup>

(7) **Rejoicing in the merit of others (*pattānumodanā*)** is the means by which one rejoices in what (good) is attained by others.<sup>35</sup> Rejoicing in the merit of others is itself an act of merit. We should feel happy when others perform acts of merit, and say "Sadhu! [Excellent!]." This is in fact a simple form of the practice of altruistic joy (*muditā*), which is one of the divine abodes (which are lovingkindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity).<sup>36</sup>

(8) **Listening to the Dharma (*dhamma-s,savana*)** is the means by which one listens to the Dharma.<sup>37</sup> The most common way to learn the Dharma is through *listening*.<sup>38</sup> Attentive listening is a great support for wisdom, especially when we are engaged in a living transmission with an experienced and compassionate teacher who not only corrects our views, but also straightens our conduct: we are trained in both mind and body, which is a good preparation for meditation practice. We will not be able to get such a wholesome educating energy through reading spiritual books, as it is a one-way act when we mostly superimpose our bias and perceptions onto what read, and often do not learn anything new. In fact, the most vital aspect of listening to the Dharma is that we become channels for preserving and propagating the Teaching.<sup>39</sup>

(9) **Teaching the Dharma (*dhamma,desanā*)** is the means by which one teaches the Dharma.<sup>40</sup> Just as it is through great merit that we are able to sit in comfort in a conducive environment to listen to the Dharma, it is through great merit that we are able to teach the Dharma. The right attitude in teaching the Dharma is very important: we should teach it in a progressive manner, in a manner that suits the audience,

<sup>29</sup> *Taṃ,taṃ,kicca,karaṇe vyavaṭṭassa bhāvo veyyāvaccam* (Abhds 135; Abhds:Be 176).

<sup>30</sup> DhsA 157 = DhsA:PR 209.

<sup>31</sup> *Attano santāne nibbattā patti dīyati etenā ti patti,dānam* (Abhds 135; Abhds:Be 176). See Gethin 1998:109.

<sup>32</sup> It Comy has *patti,anuppadāna*. "merit-giving": After giving the 4 requisites, one should honour the Three Jewels with offerings such as flowers and incense, and having done various other deeds of merit such as these, by virtue of such procurement (*pariṇāma,vasena*), one says, "May this merit (*patti*) be for all beings" (*sabba,sattānam patti hotu*) (ItA 2:25).

<sup>33</sup> DhsA 157 = DhsA:PR 209. Scholars have noted that the Buddhist notion of "transference of merit" is a carry-over from the brahminical ritual of ancestor worship (*śrāddha*): see (**Saddha**) **Jāṇussoṇī S** (A 5:269-272) = SD 2.6 & **Why the Buddha Hesitated** = SD 12.1(3.1); also Richard Gombrich, *Precept and Practice*, 1971:226-240 & Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, 2000:65.

<sup>34</sup> On dedication of merit, see **Jāṇussoṇī S** (A 10.177/5:269-273) = SD 2.6 & **Tiro,kuḍḍa S** (Kh 7/6 = Pv 1.5/4 f) = SD 2.7 esp Intro (4).

<sup>35</sup> *Pattim anumodati etāyā ti pattānumodanā* (Abhds 135; Abhds:Be 176).

<sup>36</sup> DhsA 157 = DhsA:PR 209. On the divine abodes, see **Metta,sahagata S** (S 46.54/5:115-121) = SD 10.11.

<sup>37</sup> *Dhammam suṇanti etenā ti dhamma-s,savanam* (Abhds 135; Abhds:Be 176).

<sup>38</sup> On the three levels of learning, see **Levels of Learning** = SD 40.4.

<sup>39</sup> DhsA 157 = DhsA:PR 209.

<sup>40</sup> *Dhammam desenti etāyā ti dhamma,desanā* (Abhds 135; Abhds:Be 176).



out of compassion, not out of desire for material gain, and harming neither self nor other.<sup>41</sup> Unless we are fully awakened, we should be mindful of our own ignorance and wrong views, even as we teach. As such, preparing well for the lesson, constantly cultivating the mind, and a compassionate willingness to listen to others are important aspects of effective Dharma-teaching. As we learn, we will teach; as we teach, we will learn.<sup>42</sup>

(10) **Straightening out of views (*ditṭhi'jju,kamma*)** is the act of straightening one's views.<sup>43</sup> Even saints of the path, short of the arhat, are known as "learners" (*sekha*); which means that if we are not yet awakened, we must really be mindful of what we really know and what we do not know. The learning process is usually a progressive one, with an episode of learning building upon the previous ones, and letting go of wrong views like a snake moulting its skin.<sup>44</sup> **The Caṅkī Sutta** (M 95) provides an interesting twelve-step learning process which also serves as a tool for correcting wrong views.<sup>45</sup>

**5.2 THE GROUPINGS OF THE 10 GROUND FOR MERIT-MAKING.** The Abhidhamma tradition, like the Commentaries, having expanded the three grounds for merit-making into ten, then shows how the ten fit into the original three:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (1) Giving ( <i>dāna</i> ) group:         | giving, dedication of merits, and rejoicing in others' merit.   |
| (2) Moral virtue ( <i>sīla</i> ) group:   | moral virtue, respect, and service.   |
| (3) Cultivation ( <i>bhāvanā</i> ) group: | cultivation, listening to the Dharma, teaching the Dharma, and straightening one's views. (DA 3:1000) |

(1) The giving group is characterized by non-greed (*alobha*), that is, generosity or renunciation, and it opposes envy and stinginess.

(2) The moral virtue group is characterized by non-hate (*adosa*), meaning good will, and it opposes greed (*lobha*) and hate (*dosa*).

(3) The cultivation group is characterized by non-delusion (*amoha*), meaning wisdom or knowledge, and opposes delusion (*moha*) and wrong views (*ditṭhi*).

The ten grounds are capable of producing merit for the eight types of wholesome consciousness [5.3], unless we have attained dhyana (*jhāna*) or path consciousness (*magga*) in meditation. So they generally give rise to wholesome karma pertaining to the sense sphere.

**5.3 THE NATURE OF MERIT.** All actions (bodily or verbal) arise from the mind. The body and speech function merely as doors through which the mind expresses itself. The unguarded mind is often overcome by greed, hate or delusion, the three unwholesome roots of action, motivating it to commit unwholesome deeds, especially breaking the precepts.

Cultivating the grounds for merit-making is like weeding the garden: negative thoughts are removed at least temporarily from the mind. As such, merit can cleanse our minds and guard it against the unwholesome roots. It is also clear here that the wholesome roots—non-greed, non-hate and non-delusion—are sources of merit, that is, good karma. Conversely, the three unwholesome roots of greed, hate and delusion prevent the arising of merit, and bringing about bad karma.

**5.3.1 EIGHT TYPES OF WHOLESOME CONSCIOUSNESS.** In the Abhidhamma, there are **eight types of wholesome consciousness** (*sobhana citta*) pertaining to the sense sphere (*kāmāvacara*). Four of them contain only two wholesome roots (non-greed, non-hate) while the other four contain all three wholesome roots (non-greed, non-hate, non-delusion/knowledge). Each group is further subdivided as to whether they are prompted (*sasaṅkhārika*), as a result of an internal or external stimulus, or unprompted (*asaṅkhārika*), that is, spontaneously, without being instigated by anyone; and whether they are accompanied by joy (*somanassa, sampayutta*) or by equanimity (*upekkhā, sampayutta*).<sup>46</sup> In the ultimate sense, these eight

<sup>41</sup> Udāyī S (A 5.159/3:184) = SD 46.1; On how to teach the Dharma, see also Candūpama S (S 16.3/2:197-199) = SD 38.2; (Pacchā,bhūmaka,gāmikā) Deva,daha S (S 22.2/3:5-8) = SD 46.2.

<sup>42</sup> See DhsA 157 = DhsA:PR 209.

<sup>43</sup> *Ditṭhiyā uju,karaṇaṃ ditṭhi'jju,kammaṃ* (Abhds 135; Abhds:Be 176).

<sup>44</sup> See Uraga S (Sn 1-17).

<sup>45</sup> M 95.20-33/173-176 = SD 21.15 & also Intro (5). See also DhsA 157 = DhsA:PR 209.

<sup>46</sup> Here, "equanimity" is not the dhyanic equanimity, but the worldly sense of the term.

types of wholesome consciousness comprise all the meritorious actions or wholesome karma pertaining to the sense sphere. These wholesome consciousness (*kusala,citta*) of the sense-sphere are summarized as follows:

- |                                |             |                    |
|--------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| (1) Accompanied by joy,        | prompted,   | with knowledge.    |
| (2) Accompanied by joy,        | prompted,   | without knowledge. |
| (3) Accompanied by joy,        | unprompted, | with knowledge.    |
| (4) Accompanied by joy,        | unprompted, | without knowledge. |
| (5) Accompanied by equanimity, | prompted,   | with knowledge.    |
| (6) Accompanied by equanimity, | prompted,   | without knowledge. |
| (7) Accompanied by equanimity, | unprompted, | with knowledge.    |
| (8) Accompanied by equanimity, | unprompted, | without knowledge. |

5.3.2 TWO-ROOT AND THREE-ROOT WHOLESOME KARMA. If one performs a wholesome deed with the knowledge of karma and its effects, then the wholesome consciousness is “associated with knowledge” (*ñāṇa,sampayutta*). The volition will be accompanied with all three wholesome roots: non-greed, non-hate, non-delusion; thus, gaining the **three-root** (*ti,hetuka*) wholesome karma. Even better, if while doing a whole deed, we develop insight knowledge by reflecting that everything in this world is impermanent, suffering and not self. This wholesome karma is accompanied by the three good roots, too.

On the other hand, if we do a wholesome deed without any knowledge of karma and its effects, we are doing it without knowledge (*ñāṇa,vippayutta*). Thus, the intention will not be accompanied by non-delusion, but by only the two roots of non-greed and non-hate. As such, it is a **two-root** (*dvi,hetuka*) karma.

5.3.3 SUPERIOR AND INFERIOR WHOLESOME KARMA. When acting on the ten grounds for merit-making, our intention before and after the wholesome action is very important. If we can develop wholesome consciousness before and after the wholesome action, then the wholesome intention behind the moral action is attended by other good intentions. As a result, its potential is strengthened. The wholesome karma is superior (*ukkaṭṭha*).

To acquire this type of superior karma, we should think of the wholesome action in advance and feel joy for having the chance to do it. Again after performing the action, one should reflect on it and feel joy thinking about the goodness of the action.

On the other hand, if we feel indolent or reluctant or envious or stingy before a wholesome action, such as giving alms, and later regret doing it, then the wholesome intention of giving will be surrounded by other unwholesome volitions. As such, its potential is weakened. The wholesome karma is inferior (*omaka*).

Thus, four types of wholesome karma are acquired in performing the ten grounds for merit-making, namely:

- (1) superior three-root karma.
- (2) inferior three-root karma.
- (3) superior two-root karma.
- (4) inferior two-root karma.

Each of the four types can be performed with joy or with equanimity, making a total of eight types of wholesome consciousness. Of the four, (1) is the best. If it conditions the rebirth-consciousness, the person will be reborn with three wholesome roots (*ti,hetuka*) in a happy human birth and amongst the devas, and will have the ability to attain dhyana and path consciousness.

Both types (2) and (3) are about equal. If either one conditions the rebirth-consciousness, the person will be reborn with two wholesome roots (*dvi,hetuka*) in a happy human birth or amongst the devas, but he will not possess the ability to attain dhyana and path consciousness.

Type (4) is the weakest. If it conditions the rebirth-consciousness, the person will be reborn in a happy state (*sugati*) but without any good root (*ahetuka*), for example, as a human being with deformities, or as an earth-bound deva with little power, in a lower level of the Heaven of the Four Great Kings (*Catum,mahā.rājika*), the lowest of the sense-world heavens.

## 6 Closing comments

**6.1 Buddhism transformed.** There are at least two ways in which religious teachings, indeed, a whole religion, can change, through hermeneutics or through politics. **Hermeneutics** can be described as the development and study of theories of the interpreting and understanding of texts. In other words, hermeneutics tries to understand why people think or practise the Buddhism they way they do, and how Buddhism is influenced and shaped by cultural and social forces. This understanding is then used to interpret the meaning of Buddhist texts and symbols (such as iconography or architecture), which may be either historical or contemporary. Here, **politics** refers to the “politics of authenticity,” that is, *who* has “the right and true teachings,” and who *defines* the authenticity, so that this gives an advantage in the control of the religion’s history, community and resources, which actually boils down to concentration of power and wealth in the person or group concerned. This is the *churching* of Buddhism.

**Jonathan S Walters**, in his paper, “Buddhist History: The Sri Lankan Pāli Vamsas [sic] and Their Community” (2000), for example, makes a stimulating study of how the monks of the powerful Mahā,vihāra of Sri Lanka, which flourished between the 3rd century BCE and 11th century, tried to situate the Dīpa,vamsa, Mahā,vamsa and Vams’attha-p,pakāsini—ancient Sinhala chronicles—to present their conflict with the more liberal Abhaya.giri,vihāra in Anuradhapura in their favour. The idea was to show that *only* the Mahā,vihāra, by way of lineage (*paramparā*), went right back to the Buddha himself, so as to be “authentic” and, most importantly, worthy of royal patronage. The success of the Mahā,vihāra led to the destruction of the Abhaya.giri,vihāra.<sup>47</sup>

By the time of **Buddhaghosa** (5th century), the best known of Theravadin commentators, the Mahā,vihāra, probably because of its worldly achievements and royal patronage, began to lose the lifeblood of the Buddha Dharma. Meditation was neglected, or at best ritualized, and textual study and preservation took over its place. The worship of the word and books had begun in Theravada.<sup>48</sup>

The Commentaries that Buddha,ghosa compiled under the imprimatur of the Mahā,vihāra uncharacteristically divided Buddhist practice into the dualism of the “burdens” (*dhura*) of textual study (*gantha, dhura*) and of “meditation” (*vipassanā, dhura*).<sup>49</sup> Apparently, those monks preoccupied with more worldly affairs would opt for “textual study.” This may also explain why “academic” monastics today tend not to be serious about their mental cultivation.

**Sujato**, in his analysis of how the Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas were compiled, noted that by around 20 BCE, when the Suttas had reached their final form,

these texts, rather than being meditation teachings, as would appear, were a fossilization of already ancient scripture into a form suitable for theoretical study. In this sense they might be compared with the Paṭisambhidāmagga, the Visuddhimagga, or indeed the many contemporary books and manuals on meditation by monks and scholars who themselves have never meditated. (2004b:217)

<sup>47</sup> **The Abhaya.giri monastery**, also called the Uttara Vihāra, was founded by king Vaṭṭa,gāmaṇi Abhaya in the 1st century BCE. One of the reasons for this was to displace the Mahā,vihāra monastery (erected by king Devanam,piya Tissa, 3rd cent BCE) which had become very powerful (and meddling in the kingdom’s politics) and too worldly. In 1165 a Buddhist council reconciled the two schools. However, when Anuradhapura was abandoned around the 13th century, Abhaya.giri history effectively ended. “Abhayagiri” (Fearless Mountain) is today the name of the first Theravada forest monastery (of Ajahn Chah’s tradition) to be set up in the USA in the 1980s by Ajahn Sumedho on a 120-acre forest land in Redwood Valley. The land was donated through the generosity of Master Hsuan-hua, the abbot of the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas (in Ukiah, California) in his dream of bringing together the northern and southern traditions. The ancient Abhaya.giri “was most notable for welcoming practitioners and teachers from many different Buddhist traditions. They lived there amicably alongside one another, distinct in their particular practices but not separate as communities. During the fourth century Abhayagiri housed 5,000 monks.”

(<http://www.abhayagiri.org/index.php/main/content/C50>)

<sup>48</sup> See **Satipaṭṭhāna Suttas** = SD 13.1(12).

<sup>49</sup> AA 1:312; DhA 1:154; ThaA 2:101; ApA 275.

In fact, even today, Sinhalese monks, especially those on overseas missions hardly meditate, much less teach it effectively, if they ever do so. The emphasis has now turned to reifying and ritualizing the Dharma. **HL Seneviratne**, in his book, *The Work of Kings*,<sup>50</sup> a study of religious changes in contemporary Sinhalese Buddhism, notes:

The study of Buddhism as a thought system is the precursor to its objectification, its acquisition as part of the paraphernalia of nationalist resurgence, its fetishization, and ultimately its use as an instrument of oppression. (Seneviratne, 1999:311 n42)

In simpler terms, Sinhalese Buddhism became highly ritualized, with greater emphasis on book worship,<sup>51</sup> tree worship, ancestor worship, deva worship—and the transfer of merit. Now we begin to see probably how the original *three* grounds for merit into giving, moral virtue and cultivation multiplied *tenfold*. Notice especially how **giving** (*dāna*) is reinterpreted in terms of “transference of merit”; **moral virtue** becomes externalized and ritualized into a formal display of deference and serving the monks (reminiscent of the days of monastic slavery). And most significantly, **cultivation** (*bhāvanā*) is reified into the brahminization and churking of Buddhism: merely listening and teaching Buddhism, and keeping to the official views, without emphasis on proper meditation and mindfulness<sup>52</sup>

**6.2 Buddhism transforming.** Although Buddhism has been badly abused and falsified through the ages, by those very people who claim to be its protectors and practitioners, the Dharma has its own internal safety devices put there by the Buddha and the early saints themselves. The key to these devices lie deep in the stillness of our minds. Only the still-minded may enter the secret garden of the True Dharma. The others are only drawing graffiti on the garden wall and peddling junk under it.

The first step in the right direction is the practice of generosity or true-hearted giving. True giving is motivated by the reflection that nothing belongs to us except our karma, and that the *more* we give, the more *love* we give, and the more *loved* we are in return. Our purpose in giving should be to beautify our hearts and support our minds in cultivation.<sup>53</sup> This is accentuated when we give to those who are worthy of the giving.

Giving as the ground of merit may bring some kind of good karmic fruit, such as a good rebirth, but is by itself insufficient for true spiritual progress. However, it has great potential as the basis for the practice of the precepts to strengthen moral virtue. Both the joy of giving and the power of moral virtue are greatly conducive to mental cultivation. It is for this reason that the three are put together as a set: *for the sake of effective mental cultivation*.<sup>54</sup>

This is not to say that the other seven grounds are totally useless, but that they should be practised in such a way that they do not encourage monastic to fail in their spiritual training, and that they (the grounds and the monastics) are conducive to our spiritual progress.

It is useful to remember, as stated in the virtues of the Sangha (*saṅgha,guṇa*), that the noble disciples are a “supreme field of merit” (*anuttaram puñña-k,khettam*), and that “merit” enhances spiritual training. In fact, we are unequivocally exhorted not to fear it, as stated in **the (Puñña) Mettā Sutta** (A 7.58a) and **the Mā Puñña Bhāyī Sutta** (It 1.22):

“Bhikshus, fear not merit; bhikshus, it is a name for happiness; that is to say merit (*puññānam*).”  
(A 7.58a/4:88 f = SD 2.11) = (It 1.3.1/14)

Finally, **the Nidhi,kaṇḍa Sutta** (Khp 8) sings of the power of merit:

<sup>50</sup> **HL Seneviratne**, *The Works of Kings*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

<sup>51</sup> This trend became more marked in early Mahayana and grew with the rise of the scribal tradition and books.

<sup>52</sup> On how this happened in Malaysia in the late 20th century, see Piyasilo, *How Malaysian Buddhists Solve Their Problems, or The Churking of Buddhism in Malaysia*, 1992.

<sup>53</sup> See **(Maha-p,phala) Dāna S** (A 7.49/4:59-63) = SD 2.3.

<sup>54</sup> This is not to say that the other 7 grounds are totally useless: they should be practised in such a way that they do not encourage monastic to fail in their spiritual training, and that they (the grounds and the monastics) are conducive to our spiritual progress.

*Asādhāraṇam aññesaṃ  
acor'āharaṇo nidhi  
kayirātha dhīro puññāni  
yo nidhi anugāmiko*

No one else can have a share in it,  
thieves cannot steal this treasure:  
so let the steadfast make merit,  
the store that will follow them. (Khp 8.9/7)

— — —

## The Discourse on the Grounds for Merit-making

A 8.36/4:241-243

(Originating in Sāvattḥī.)

- 1 Bhikshus, there are these three grounds for merit-making. What are the three?
- 2 (1) The ground for merit-making through giving (*dāna, mayam puñña, kiriya, vatthu*).  
(2) The ground for merit-making through moral virtue (*sīla, mayam puñña, kiriya, vatthu*).  
(3) The ground for merit-making through cultivation (*bhāvanā, mayam puñña, kiriya, vatthu*).

### Unfavourable human birth

- 3 Here, bhikshus, a certain person is one  
who has made *little* ground for merit-making through giving;  
who has made *little* ground for merit-making through moral virtue;  
but has *not* made any ground for merit-making through cultivation.

After death, when the body has broken up, he is reborn amongst humans in an *unfavourable* condition.<sup>55</sup>

### Favourable human birth

- 4 Here, bhikshus, a certain person is one  
who has made *some* ground for merit-making through giving;  
who has made *some* ground for merit-making through moral virtue;  
but has *not* made any ground for merit-making through cultivation.

After death, when the body has broken up, he is reborn amongst humans in a *favourable* condition.<sup>56</sup>

### The Four Great Kings and their devas

- 5 Here, bhikshus, a certain person is one  
who has made *very much* ground for merit-making through giving;  
who has made [242] *very much* ground for merit-making through moral virtue;  
but has *not* made any ground for merit-making through cultivation.

After death, when the body has broken up, he is reborn in companionship with the devas of the Four Great Kings.

There, bhikshus, **the Four Great Kings**

who has done *much more* ground for merit-making through giving,  
who has done *much more* ground for merit-making through moral virtue,  
surpassed the devas of the Four Great Kings in ten ways:  
in divine lifespan, in divine beauty, in divine happiness, in divine fame, in divine lordship, in divine form, in divine sound, in divine fragrance, in divine taste, in divine touch.

<sup>55</sup> “Amongst humans in an unfavourable condition,” *manussa, dobhaggam*.

<sup>56</sup> “Amongst humans in a favourable condition,” *manussa, sobhaggam*.



### Shakra and the devas of Thirty-three

- 6 Here, bhikshus, a certain person is one  
 who has made *very much* ground for merit-making through giving;  
 who has made *very much* ground for merit-making through moral virtue;  
 but has *not* made any ground for merit-making through cultivation.

After death, when the body has broken up, he is reborn in companionship with the devas of Thirty-three.

There, bhikshus, **Shakra**, the leader of the devas,  
 who had done *much more* ground for merit-making through giving,  
 who had done *much more* ground for merit-making through moral virtue,  
 surpassed the devas of the Thirty-three in ten ways:  
 in divine lifespan, in divine beauty, in divine happiness, in divine fame, in divine lordship, in divine form, in divine sound, in divine fragrance, in divine taste, in divine touch.

### Suyāma and the Suyāma devas

- 7 Here, bhikshus, a certain person is one  
 who has made *very much* ground for merit-making through giving;  
 who has made *very much* ground for merit-making through moral virtue;  
 but has *not* made any ground for merit-making through cultivation.

After death, when the body has broken up, he is reborn in companionship with the Yāma devas.

There, bhikshus, **the devaputra Suyāma**,  
 who had done *much more* ground for merit-making through giving,  
 who had done *much more* ground for merit-making through moral virtue,  
 surpassed the Yāma devas in ten ways:  
 in divine lifespan, in divine beauty, in divine happiness, in divine fame, in divine lordship, in divine form, in divine sound, in divine fragrance, in divine taste, in divine touch.

### Santusita and the Tusita devas

- 8 Here, bhikshus, a certain person is one  
 who has made *very much* ground for merit-making through giving;  
 who has made *very much* ground for merit-making through moral virtue;  
 but has *not* made any ground for merit-making through cultivation.

After death, when the body has broken up, he is reborn in companionship with the Tusita devas. [243]

There, bhikshus, **the devaputra Santusita**,  
 who had done *much more* ground for merit-making through giving,  
 who had done *much more* ground for merit-making through moral virtue,  
 surpassed the Tusita devas in ten ways:  
 in divine lifespan, in divine beauty, in divine happiness, in divine fame, in divine lordship, in divine form, in divine sound, in divine fragrance, in divine taste, in divine touch.

### Sunimmita and the Nimmāna,ratī devas

- 9 Here, bhikshus, a certain person is one  
 who has made *very much* ground for merit-making through giving;  
 who has made *very much* ground for merit-making through moral virtue;  
 but he has *not* made any ground for merit-making through cultivation.

After death, when the body has broken up, he is reborn in companionship with the Nimmāna,ratī devas [who delight in creating].

There, bhikshus, **the devaputra Sunimmita**,  
 who had done *much more* ground for merit-making through giving,

who had done *much more* ground for merit-making through moral virtue, surpassed the Nimmāṇa, ratī devas in ten ways: in divine lifespan, in divine beauty, in divine happiness, in divine fame, in divine lordship, in divine form, in divine sound, in divine fragrance, in divine taste, in divine touch.

### Vasavatti and the Para, nimmita, vasavatti devas

**10** Here, bhikshus, a certain person is one who has made *very much* ground for merit-making through giving; who has made *very much* ground for merit-making through moral virtue; but he has *not* made any ground for merit-making through cultivation.

After death, when the body has broken up, he is reborn in companionship with the Para, nimmita, vasavatti devas [who lord over the creation of others].

There, bhikshus, **the devaputra Vasavatti**,

who had done *much more* ground for merit-making through giving, who had done *much more* ground for merit-making through moral virtue, surpassed the Para, nimmita, vasavatti devas in ten ways: in divine lifespan, in divine beauty, in divine happiness, in divine fame, in divine lordship, in divine form, in divine sound, in divine fragrance, in divine taste, in divine touch.

These, bhikshus, are the three grounds for merit-making.

— evaṃ —

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080131; 080829; 090923; 111218; 130105